

OBITUARY.

EDWARD PIERSON RAMSAY, LL.D.

Curator, 22nd September, 1874 to 31st December, 1894.

Dr. E. P. Ramsay was the third son of David Ramsay, M.D., the owner of the Dobroyd Estate, Dobroyd Point, Long Cove. He was born at Dobroyd House on 3rd December 1842, and was, therefore, in his 75th year at the time of his death. His education took place at St. Mark's Collegiate School, first at Darling Point and later at Macquarie Fields, presided over by the Rev. G. F. Macarthur, who later became Head Master of The King's School, Parramatta.

In 1863, Mr. Ramsay matriculated at the University, and (in the same year) also entered as a student of St. Paul's College. His name remained on the list of members of the University until December, 1865.

In apportioning the Dobroyd Estate amongst the children of Dr. David Ramsay, the large and beautiful garden was allotted to the subject of this notice, and came into his hands about the year 1867. He forthwith opened the Dobroyd New Plant and Seed Nursery on 15th December, 1867, and was engaged in its management until he was appointed Curator of the Australian Museum. On the subject of this Nursery, Mr. J. H. Maiden wrote to me thus:—

“ I have before me a ‘ Revised List of Novelties ’ for 1876, cultivated for sale. . . . This is a creditable catalogue of 46 pages, with an index and a number of illustrations, most of them local products. Some of the plants were claimed to be offered for the first time in the Colonies, and I have no doubt the claim was a perfectly just one. . . . He had, undoubtedly considerable knowledge in regard to the names and propagation of such plants as fell within his purview, and I look upon him as a gentleman amateur of the old days, belonging to the same category as the Macarthurs of Camden, who, like himself, imported plants for the love of the thing, and with the desire to recoup themselves wholly or in part by sales to the Public.”

From boyhood, his interest in everything relating to plants and animals had been intense. His taste was fostered by an under-master at a private school, by Dr. S. R. Pittard (a former Curator), His Excellency Sir William Thomas Denison, The Honbl. A. W. Scott, of Ash Island and Lepidoptera fame, and other scientific friends.

In connection with the said under-master, the Rev. W. H. H. Yarrington has favoured me with the following information:

“ I became acquainted with him in 1861 when he visited a German scientific teacher at the Rev. J. Pendrill's School, Glebe Point (where I was a teacher). This gentleman, Herr Reitmann, and Mr. Ramsay were enthusiastic students of Natural Science. . . . He seemed to know something about every department. His enthusiasm was most intense, and what was very remarkable was his wonderfully retentive memory for the names, both generic and specific, especially of ferns.”

Mr. Ramsay's entry into scientific life was probably at about the age of twenty, when he became Treasurer of the Entomological Society of New South Wales, at its inception. Just how long he so remained we do not know, but it may be till the Society's demise in 1873,¹ when it practically became linked up with the Linnean Society.

Another notable event in the career of the future Curator was his election as a Life Member of the Royal Society of New South Wales, at its inception in 1865, appearing as such in the list of members printed in the first volume of the Society's "Transactions" for 1868 (1869). He had already communicated a paper, be it noted, to the Royal Society's forerunner, the Philosophical Society of New South Wales—"On the Oology of Australia,"² read on 5th July, 1865, a paper that appears to have escaped the eye of most bibliographers. His election to this old Society took place 7th June, 1865.

The months of August to November, 1866, inclusive, were spent on the Richmond River, no doubt occupied in zoological researches.

¹ Dixon—Presidential Address—*Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S. Wales*, xxix., pt. i., 1904, p. 6.

² Ramsay—*Trans. Phil. Soc. N.S. Wales*, 1862-65 (1866), p. 309.

In 1868, accompanied by a younger brother, Mr. Ramsay visited Queensland to inquire into the sugar-growing industry, and later purchased Sindah Plantation, on the Mary River. In this venture other brothers joined, but like many pioneering undertakings it proved a failure.

Mr. Ramsay was appointed Curator of this Institution at a Special Meeting of Trustees, held on 22nd September, 1874, being proposed by the Honbl. [Sir] W. J. Macleay and [Sir] Alfred Roberts, Esq. His appointment was the means of causing a dispute between the Trustees and the Government of the day, as to the formers' right to appoint their Curator without reference to the latter. Indeed, the Under-Secretary for Justice (the Museum was then affiliated to the Department of Justice) went so far as to say that no salary could be paid to a Curator whose appointment had not been sanctioned by the Government. The Trustees, however, were very soon able, in virtue of their Act of Incorporation, to convince the Under-Secretary that they had the power.

At that time a portion of the Curatorial duties was residence within the building, and here Mr. Ramsay lived with his family until 1888, when the question of space for the accommodation of an increasing staff became a burning one. With the idea of alleviating this pressure the North Wing was dismantled and an extra story added during 1891-2; from this time onward the Curator ceased to reside on the premises.

The Linnean Society of New South Wales came into existence in 1874 through the efforts of a few zealous scientists, conspicuous amongst whom were Dr. H. G. Alleyne, Commander T. Stackhouse, R.N., Sir W. J. Macleay, and Prof. W. J. Stephens, but the actual founders, so Mr. J. J. Fletcher informs me were the two first-named. Whether Mr. Ramsay took an active part, or no, in the preliminary arrangements is not known, "but after the Society started, he certainly was a very active and a very useful member."³ He was one of the Foundation Members, and a Member of the first Council, a position he maintained until his retirement in 1892. He rendered

"most important aid in support of the Society, in furthering its interests during the critical stages of its history. . . . He was well acquainted with the fauna from his boyhood,

especially with the birds. His early knowledge of it covered a very interesting period, when it had not been anything like so seriously interfered with by settlement as it unfortunately is now."³

In association with Sir William he acted as one of the Honorary Secretaries from 1885 to 1890.

During 1880-81 was held the Melbourne International Exhibition which Mr. Ramsay attended as one of the New South Wales Commissioners.⁴

The Museum was awarded the "First Order of Merit" Certificate, equal to a Bronze Medal, for a collection of "stuffed birds and fish"; Ramsay was awarded a "Diploma" in recognition of his services.

In the "Catalogue of Exhibits in the New South Wales Court," etc. printed by the Government Printer here, in 1880, it is remarked:—

"A Collection of food fishes from the waters of Port Jackson and the neighbourhood, exhibited by Mr. Ramsay, Curator of the Australian Museum, should possess a considerable interest. In company with the last-named collection will be found another of the Birds indigenous to the Colony, made by the same gentleman."⁵

This Melbourne Exhibition was simply the successor of the "Sydney International Exhibition" of 1879, better known as the Garden Palace Exhibition. It was opened on 17th September and closed on the 20th April, 1880. At this display Ramsay acted as a Judge in "Classes 604-610, Animal Products, Land and Marine, used as Materials"⁶; for his labours in this capacity he was awarded a bronze medal. In a moment of what was, no doubt, well meant but at the same time the weakest of policy, the Trustees transferred, towards the end of 1879, possibly in September,⁷ the whole of their valuable Ethnological Collection, spoken of in the "Reports of Judges

³ Quotation from a letter from Mr. J. J. Fletcher to the writer.

⁴ Official Record, etc., 1882, p. xxv.

⁵ Official Record, etc., 1882, p. 9.

⁶ Official Record, etc., 1881, pp. cliv. and 707.

⁷ Because it was thrown open on 9th December, Prince of Wales' Birthday (Coombes—Official Report, 1881, p. lxxiv.)

and Awards” as the “finest collection (Ethnological) in the Exhibition,”⁸ and in recognition of its value, a large silver medal was awarded to the Institution.⁹ At the close of the Exhibition this excellent series in common with other valuable collections (Library and Records of the Linnean Society, exhibits destined to form a Technological Museum, Geological collection of the Department of Mines, with records and plans appertaining to other Departments) were left in this jim-crack building, and on the night of 22nd September, 1882, the whole were totally destroyed by fire.

Now this Ethnological series, amassed by Ramsay, with and at great labour and expense,

“with its wonderful variety of Native Weapons, Dresses, Utensils, and Ornaments, and everything that could go to illustrate the Ethnology of Polynesia and Australia stretched along the one side of the eastern transept.”¹⁰

All that was left was a photograph and a poor “Official Catalogue,”¹¹ containing no less than 1922 entries.

Nothing daunted by this catastrophe, Ramsay energetically set to work to replace the lost specimens as far as could be done, and so successful were his efforts that it became necessary to add a hall at the south end of the Museum to contain the new gatherings; this was completed during the first half of 1886.

During the regime of Mr. Gerard Krefft as Curator (Dr. Ramsay’s predecessor) was commenced under the auspices of the Trustees, the exploration of the caves and rivers of New South Wales. Cave ossiferous explorations were carried on by Krefft—indeed, he appears to have been the instigator of this line of research—from 1866 to 1870, at Wellington, in conjunction with Prof. A. M. Thomson. This excellent work was resumed by Mr. Ramsay at Wellington and other places, and continued throughout 1881-2.¹² The rivers exploration went on for some time longer, and is more fully referred to on page 214.

⁸ Official Record, etc., 1881, p. 284.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. clvii.

¹⁰ Coombes—*Ibid.* p. lxxxvii.

¹¹ Ethnological Gallery. Official Catalogue of the General Ethnological Collection, 1880, pp. 25-48.

¹² Votes of Proceedings, etc., 1882, p. 551.

In 1880 a Royal Commission was appointed

“to enquire into and report upon the actual state and prospect of the Fisheries of this Colony.”

Mr. Ramsay had a seat on the Commission. Shortly after the destruction of the Garden Palace (1882) in which were stored the records of the old Commissioners of Fisheries for New South Wales, Ramsay became a Commissioner, on 31st October, 1882, taking the place of the Honbl. Richard Hill, who had vacated his seat. The Curator remained a member of this body until 21st June, 1895, when he resigned.

On the 13th February, 1883, there appeared in the “Government Gazette” notice of the appointment of the Honbl. [Sir] Saul Samuel as Representative Commissioner, and Mr. Ramsay as Secretary in Charge of Exhibits to the “Great International Fisheries Exhibition,”^{12a} held at South Kensington, London, in 1883. The latter left Sydney on the 3rd March of that year, and in the same month of the following year, 1884, was again at his post in the Museum. During his absence the affairs of the Institution were in the hands of Mr. [Prof.] W. A. Haswell, who had already been attached to the Museum Staff, as Acting-Curator, for a portion of the time, and for the remainder, the Trustees’ Secretary, the late Mr. S. Sinclair, was placed in charge.

Under the division New South Wales, in the “Official Catalogue”¹³ are a few introductory remarks by Mr. Ramsay, wherein he said:—

“The greater portion of the Exhibits in the N.S. Wales Court have been liberally supplied by the Trustees of the Australian Museum at the request of the Commissioners, N.S. Wales Fisheries.”

He was also the author of the “Catalogue of the Exhibits in the New South Wales Court.”¹⁴ These included not only food-fishes, both fresh-water and marine, but also edible Mollusca, Chelonians, Sirenians, and a small general marine Zoological Collection. For the excellence of the specimens, their preservation, and arrangement, no less than six gold, five silver, and one bronze medal were awarded to the Trustees as representing the Museum, and a gold medal to Mr. Ramsay.¹⁵

^{12a} Here it was that the writer first made Dr. Ramsay’s acquaintance.

¹³ 3rd Edit., 1883, p. 176b.

¹⁴ 8vo. London, 1883.

¹⁵ Report Commissioners of Fisheries N.S. Wales to 31st December, 1883, p. 33.

Some years ago the control of Hyde Park passed into the hands of the Municipal Council, but previous to this the Park's affairs had been administered by a Trust, of which Ramsay was a member for many years.

In 1886 the Senate of the University of St. Andrews conferred on Mr. Ramsay the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.^{15a}

Previous to 1890 the Museum publications went under the general name of "Catalogues," a form that did not give proper scope to the activities of the Staff. At the suggestion of the present writer, Dr. Ramsay proposed to the Trustees to establish a periodical, to appear at irregular intervals, and to be confined to original articles of moderate length emanating from Museum work. The Board

"agreed on the Curator's suggestion to publish periodically reports and papers worked out by the Scientific Staff of the Museum."¹⁶

In 1890 this publication took shape as the "Records of the Australian Museum," the first two volumes appearing in 1890-91 under Ramsay's editorship.

In 1893 the Curator, whose health had been visibly declining for a considerable time previously was absent on extended leave, during which the writer acted as his *locum tenens*; during this period he paid a visit to New Zealand and spent some time in the Rotorua District. For a time the change and rest exerted a very beneficial effect, but ultimately finding the cares of office too strenuous he resigned the Curatorship on the 31st December, 1894. This, however, did not cause Dr. Ramsay's complete severance from the Institution with which he had been connected so long, for he was appointed Consulting Ornithologist, and retained this position until 28th February, 1909, when he finally retired from the service of the Trust.

^{15a} St. Andrew's University Calendar, 1895-96 (1895), p. 118.

¹⁶ Minutes, 6th August, 1889, p. 296.

From a Curatorial point of view, Dr. Ramsay's ideas were for some years certainly on the conservative side. One who knew him well¹⁷ about this time wrote me as follows:—

“I came into Museum matters when they were in a transitional stage, and I remember the old show case heresies,¹⁸ and did do something to put them away. Our friend, however, was quite conservative, and the old wooden show cases, with plenty of wood, often varnished, showing the wood in natural effect (indeed, at one Exhibition the woods of which the cases were made were advertised), the crown and sheet glass, the written labels, and the old methods of mounting and classification quite satisfied him. I remember in the early days how grieved he was at the reforms in Museum technique, which were begun by Haswell and developed to such a notable extent by yourself.”

A very marked change, however, was visible as time went on after Dr. Ramsay's return from the Fisheries' Exhibition in methods adopted here.

Where the Curator shone was amongst his birds and bird-skins, the admiration of all Foreign visitors, and these will always stand as a monument to Ramsay's name. During his period of office approximately no less than 17,600 odd skins were added to the National Collection, either by collection, by way of purchase, or as gifts, and the skin-series in particular was always with him an object of great solicitude. The series known as “The Dobroyd Collection,” made in their younger days by the Ramsay Brothers, now finds a safe repository here.

He was the author of numerous papers, too many indeed to mention, but a few of the more important will be noticed shortly. Readers interested will find a list of those published in the “Proceedings of the Linnean Society of N.S. Wales” between the years 1875 to 1885 in a supplementary volume of the series;¹⁹ these number one hundred and seven, to say nothing of numerous “Exhibitions.” A more complete list can be perused in the three volumes of the “Catalogue of Scientific Papers, compiled by the Royal Society of London,” containing the letter R. The list in question gives a total of one hundred and twenty papers, but even this cannot represent a complete record of his writings.

¹⁷ J. H. Maiden.

¹⁸ And so do I; those of the North Wing had been in position since 1856.

¹⁹ List of the Names of Contributors to the First Series (Vols. i.-x.) of the Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales, from 1875 to 1885 (8vo., Sydney, 1887.)

Among the more interesting mammals described by Dr. Ramsay was *Hypsiprymnodon moschatus*,²⁰ a Rat Kangaroo representing a new genus and species. This was collected by himself in the dense scrubs in the Rockingham Bay District, and though not rare, is still far from plentiful in collections. A Wallaby, *Macropus browni* and a Bandicoot, *Perameles cockerelli* from New Ireland²¹ were named after their discoverers, the Rev. Dr. George Brown and Mr. James Cockerell, while a second Bandicoot, *Perameles broadbenti*,²² was another striking species first made known by him. He also named several other mammals, including Bats, Rodents and Marsupials from Australia, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, while he was fortunate in receiving a distinct variety of the Echidna, *Tachyglossus aculeatus* var. *lawesi*²³ from Port Moresby. This was forwarded by the Rev. W. G. Lawes, and is differentiated from the mainland form by the greater development of the hair and its particularly narrow skull.

Dr. Ramsay's organisation of a collecting expedition by Messrs. Cairn and R. Grant, to Bellenden Kerr, Queensland, the unexplored home of the then recently discovered Tree Kangaroo (*Dendrolagus*), was the means of greatly enriching the mammalian and ornithological collections of the Australian Museum.

His Herpetological work was less conspicuous, but he described several new Reptiles, including a well-marked variety of the common Death Adder, *Acanthophis praelongus*, from Cape York. His efforts towards the furtherance of Ichthyology were of great importance, not so much on account of his writings as by the establishment of an Ichthyological Collection and his encouragement of contemporary workers. He was in constant communication with Count F. de Castelnau and Sir William John Macleay, both of whom wrote extensively upon Australian fishes, and from whom he acquired many specimens which greatly enriched the Australian Museum collection. His

²⁰ Ramsay—Proc. Linn. New South Wales, i., 1877, p. 33.

²¹ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, pp. 307, 310.

²² Ramsay—*Ibid.*, iii., 1879, p. 402.

²³ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, ii., 1877, p. 32.

official position enabled him to gather together a valuable Ichthyological library, thus enabling these authors to consult works otherwise unavailable to them.

Visiting England in 1883 as Secretary in Charge of Exhibits to the Great International Fisheries Exhibition, Dr. Ramsay met Dr. Francis Day, author of the "Fishes of India," and was able to purchase from him the greater part of the fine collection of Indian fishes upon which this work was based. It included a large number of types and co-types of Day's own species, together with a considerable number of specimens identified by the celebrated Dutch Ichthyologist, Dr. Pieter Bleeker. This invaluable collection was brought safely to Australia and formed the basis of the large Ichthyological Collection since formed in the Australian Museum.

Dr. Ramsay encouraged numerous collectors, both amateur and professional, and the earlier Museum Registers include many entries of zoological collections from all parts of Australasia, gathered together for him by local Missionaries and the officers of vessels trading in the South Seas. In 1882 he organised an expedition to the Burdekin and Mary Rivers, Queensland, with a view to investigating the fishes of that region. This was the outcome of a suggestion of Sir Richard Owen, who thought a search of some of the inter-tropical rivers of Australia might lead to the discovery of living species of archaic types of fishes, similar to *Neoceratodus*. The expedition²⁴ under Mr. Alexander Morton, failed to discover any such types, but a fine collection of the local fauna was obtained, and many species were described as new.

Among the more interesting fishes described as new by Dr. Ramsay, may be mentioned a Ribbon-fish, *Trachypterus jacksonensis*²⁵ and a large Sea Perch, *Lutianus macleayana*.²⁶ He also described and figured a large Sword-fish, *Tetrapturus indicus*²⁷ and some of our larger sharks, which were almost

²⁴ Exploration of the Caves and Rivers of N.S. Wales—Votes and Proceedings, etc., 1882, p. 551.

²⁵ Ramsay—Proc. Linn. Soc. New South Wales, v., 1881, p. 631, pl. xx.

²⁶ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, viii., 1883, p. 178.

²⁷ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, v., 1881, p. 295, pl. viii.

unknown at the time. In 1886, and for a few succeeding years, he collaborated with Mr. J. Douglas Ogilby, who had taken up a position as a Scientific Assistant on the staff of the Australian Museum, but he shortly relegated the whole of the ichthyological work to his colleague.

Between 1863 and 1899 Dr. Ramsay contributed well over one hundred papers on birds to various scientific journals—his principal vehicles of publication being “The Ibis,” “Proceedings of the Zoological Society,” “Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales,” and the Catalogues issued by the Trustees of the Australian Museum. His initial contributions to ornithological literature appeared in “The Ibis” and included a series of papers on “Notes on the Birds breeding in the neighbourhood of Sydney, New South Wales,”²⁸ and “On the *Didunculus strigirostris*, or Tooth-billed Pigeon from Upolo.”²⁹ Besides there appeared a number of occasional papers as well as frequent letters to the then editor of “The Ibis,” dealing with numerous points of interest to Ornithologists.

The years 1865 to 1884 saw many papers from his pen, and these appeared chiefly in the “Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London.” In these contributions he made known a number of new forms and familiarised workers with the rich bird-fauna of North-eastern Queensland. His papers in the “Proceedings of the Zoological Society” include descriptions of a number of new species, including *Atrichia rufescens* (“Description of a new species *Atrichia* from the Richmond River, New South Wales”)³⁰ and *Gliciphila subfaciata* and *Orthonyx spaldingi* (“On Certain New and Rare Species of Birds found at Rockingham Bay, Queensland”).³¹ Six years later the descriptions of five new species, *Cypselus terre-reginæ*, *Aeluroedus maculosus*, *Ptilotis frenata*, *Eopsaltria (?) inornata*, and *Rhipidura superciliosa*, were published under the title of “Descriptions of five new species of Birds from Queensland and of the Egg of *Chlamydodera maculata*.”³²

²⁸ Ramsay—*The Ibis*, v., 1863, p. 177.

²⁹ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, vi., p. 18.

³⁰ Ramsay—*Proc. Zool. Soc.*, 1866, p. 438.

³¹ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, 1868, p. 381.

³² Ramsay—*Ibid.*, 1874, p. 601.

In 1875 he again turned his attention to North-eastern Queensland, and in his "List of Birds met with in North-eastern Queensland, chiefly at Rockingham Bay"³³ he was able to include a new species of *Pocilodryas* (?), *P. cinereifrons*, and a new genus and species *Scenopœus dentirostris*, and two years later added a third new species *Sittella albatu*³⁴ from the same region.

Ramsay's name is also associated with two species of Fly-catchers, *Monorcha (Piezorhynchus) browni*³⁵ from the Solomon Group, and *Rhipidura jallae* from New Guinea.³⁶

The great majority of his papers on Birds, however, appeared in the "Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales." Here Ramsay published a long list of works extending over a period of eleven years. Of special interest are his "Remarks on a collection of Birds lately received from Fiji, and now forming part of the Macleayan Collection at Elizabeth Bay; with a list of all the species at present known to inhabit the Fiji Islands,"³⁷ and his "Tabular List of all the Australian Birds at present known—showing the distribution of the species,"³⁸ which appeared in the following year, privately published. This list contains the names of 744 species.

The examination and determination of the large collection of Birds obtained in New Guinea during the voyage of the "Chevert" was entrusted to him³⁹ and the results of his researches appeared in the "Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales" in 1879.

From then on until 1888 Dr. Ramsay described many birds from many widely separated localities; his activities were not confined to the island-continent, but embraced many of the little known spots of the South Pacific.

³³ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, 1875, p. 578.

³⁴ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, 1877, p. 351.

³⁵ Ramsay—*Proc. Zool. Soc.*, 1882, p. 74.

³⁶ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, 1884, p. 580.

³⁷ Ramsay—*Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S. Wales*, i., 1877, p. 69.

³⁸ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, ii., 1878, p. 177.

³⁹ Ramsay—*Ibid.*, iii., 1879, p. 100

In the meantime, he had been engaged on the preparation of a "Catalogue of the Australian Birds in the Australian Museum at Sydney, N.S.W." Part I. of this Catalogue appeared in 1876 and treated of twenty-eight species of Australian Accipitres or Diurnal Birds of Prey. Part II. or "Supplement" to this Catalogue appeared in 1890 and dealt with the sixteen species of Striges or Nocturnal Birds of Prey in the collection of the Australian Museum. The following year (1891) saw the publication of the third part, which was a full account of the Psittaci to that date, and three years (1894) later followed the fourth part which disposed of the Picariæ.

In the preparation of Parts III. and IV., Ramsay expressed his indebtedness to his assistant, Mr. A. J. North, for valuable help.

He was known amongst his intimates as a man of most genial manners, kindness of heart, and possessing a rich vein of humour.

Dr. Ramsay was elected Corresponding Member of the Zoological Society of London in 1866; elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London on 18th February, 1875; elected a Member of the Royal Irish Academy, 12th May, 1884. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and the Geological Society of London. The highest honour acquired by the subject of this notice was that of "Cavaliere" of the Crown of Italy, bestowed on him by His Majesty King Humbert. The precise date is unknown to the writer, but possibly the bestowal took place about the time of his visit to the Naples Zoological Station on the way from London to Sydney at the expiration of the Fisheries Exhibition.*

R. ETHERIDGE, JUNR.

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